

Finding of No Significant Impact for Implementation of Modifications to Pennsylvania Avenue Between 15th and 17th Streets, NW

Background

Pennsylvania Avenue has been restricted for public vehicular traffic since May 1995, when the Secretary of the Treasury, following the recommendations of a panel charged with reviewing security at the White House, ordered the Avenue restricted to public vehicular traffic between 15th and 17th Streets, NW. Temporary barriers and control points were installed at the ends and along the east-west axis of the Avenue. Madison Place and Jackson Place were also restricted to public vehicular traffic. An environmental assessment (EA) was prepared by the Department of the Treasury for restricting public vehicular traffic on Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets, NW. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this restriction of public vehicular traffic was issued by the Department of the Treasury in September 1997.

Many solutions that would allow for the removal of restrictions to public vehicular traffic on the Avenue were proposed, reviewed, and considered. In November 2001, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), (Commission) adopted the report *Designing for Security in the Nation's Capital* which concluded that due to numerous and legitimate security concerns, the Avenue should remain restricted for public vehicular traffic until changes in the security threat, or improvements to security technology, will permit the Avenue to be reopened. The Commission also called for immediate beautification of the Avenue to create a pedestrian precinct and a secure White House environment that is, in appearance and function, consistent with the values of our open, democratic society. The Commission adopted recommendations to create a landscaped civic space. This decision was reached only after considerable debate and consensus on a number of programmatic requirements, agreed to by parties involved in providing input to the Commission.

Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative is the Build Alternative, which addresses security operations, landscape treatment, and pedestrian, and vehicular circulation. It also includes conceptual recommendations for lighting and paving materials

In conjunction with the concept design, daily security operations will be relocated to Jackson and Madison Places, and the checkpoints on Pennsylvania Avenue will be limited to pre-screened or cleared motorcades, emergency equipment, and the Downtown Circulator. Security booths and a "sally port" (a secure area formed by two lines of bollards) are proposed to secure each of these four entry points.

Security booths will be positioned to allow vehicles to approach the booth on the driver's side. Fixed bollards will be placed in the sidewalks, except where there is a need to allow for the passage of vehicles or maintenance equipment. Removable bollards will be used in locations where there will be an infrequent need to remove the barrier, such as for the Inaugural Parade. Retractable bollards will be used where frequent passage is required.

Alternatives Considered

The No Action Alternative was considered in this analysis in addition to the Build Alternative. It was determined that the No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need for the action. Therefore, the Build Alternative was selected as the preferred alternative since it addresses the purpose and need of the action.

In order to minimize the environmental impacts associated with the preferred alternative, the following measures will be implemented:

- 1) Loss of parking at Jackson Place will offset increased use as a security checkpoint. Commercial parking in locations adjacent to the project area will have to be utilized.
- 2) Businesses and Institutions will need to coordinate with the USSS to accommodate trucks over 40 feet.
- 3) Increase width of access through security line at Jackson and Madison Places to improve circulation by-pass and loading for adjacent uses.
- 4) USSS will need to coordinate with the US Park Police to ensure pedestrian barriers used during times of high alert will be placed at inner bollard line to maintain access to retail.
- 5) Slight increase in outer bollard line setback needed to minimize conflicts between pedestrian crosswalk and vehicle queuing at Jackson and Madison Places.
- 6) For improved news media access to Madison Place, the travel-way will be increased through the security line to improve staging area, circulation, by-pass and emergency access.
- 7) Final mitigation for impacts to historic properties are still to be determined; however, the design and intent of mitigation measures are to preserve historic vistas and views, and introduce trees to Pennsylvania Avenue.
- 8) Maintenance-of-traffic plans required for short-term transportation and construction related issues.
- 9) Short-term disruption of utilities, if they occur, would be minimized during construction. Specific measures will be considered and applied, if unforeseen impacts occur.
- 10) Utilities will be upgraded where necessary to reduce long-term maintenance.
- 11) To mitigate for the reversibility of Pennsylvania Avenue, it is anticipated that there will be minimal relative cost associated with reversing Pennsylvania Avenue back to a vehicular thoroughfare, dependant on the extent of items removed to accommodate the reversal. The total estimated cost to open Pennsylvania Avenue to traffic, if the proposed granite and rustic paving remain in place, is \$50,000.00. However, if the granite and rustic paving requires

removal, due to aesthetic and historic concerns, the estimated cost inclusive of an asphalt overlay and contingencies, is \$675,000.00. The road is being constructed to meet appropriate standards. The location of curbs and gutters will remain in their current location. The other associated costs will involve traffic signal timing changes, addition of signage, striping of Pennsylvania Avenue, removal of the bollards and guard booths and various incidentals.

- 12) The contractor will be required to comply with FHWA Standard Construction Specifications that require protection and assign responsibility for damage caused by contractor actions to adjacent properties. Prior to initiation of construction activities, a visual record will be made by the contractor of the existing condition of potentially affected structures and improvements. A decision will be made on possible use of monitoring devices at the time the visual record and inspection are completed.
- 13) While construction activities associated with the proposed action are in affect, historic properties will be monitored to determine if vibrations associated with construction activities are having a detrimental impact on those structures.
- 14) During periods of high security, the United States Secret Service (USSS) will cooperate with businesses and institutions on Jackson and Madison Places to assure unobstructed pedestrian access to them.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

A summary of the environmental consequences of the proposed action is provided below:

Land and Zoning Impacts

Land Use:

Land use in the study area is zoned as GOV (Government – President’s Park), SP2 (Special Purpose 2 – Jackson and Madison Place, and H Street between Jackson and Madison Place) and C-4 (Commercial 4 – 15th and 17th Streets, between Pennsylvania Avenue and H Street).

There are no residential land uses in the study area. Zoning within the study area is largely consistent with the developed land; therefore, there is no significant impact to land use.

Relationship to Existing Zoning:

No zoning variances would be required, and the proposed improvements would be compatible with the current and allowed uses. Since this action serves as an enhancement to an existing primarily government use environment, there is no direct impact on its current use.

Security:

On Jackson and Madison Places, the security booths will sit on an extended sidewalk positioned to channel vehicles as they enter or exit the secure area, providing approximately 24 feet for two-way circulation. On Pennsylvania Avenue, the temporary security improvements will be replaced with bollards, and architecturally appropriate security booths with a sally port. The security booths will be positioned to allow vehicles to approach the booth on the driver's side. Fixed bollards will be placed in the sidewalks, except where there is a need to allow for the passage of vehicles or maintenance equipment. Removable bollards will be used in locations where there will be an infrequent need to remove the barrier, such as for the Inaugural Parade. Retractable bollards will be used where frequent passage is required, and security enhanced overall.

The redesigned security booths and additional bollards will function as an enhancement to an existing condition; therefore, no significant impact is associated with the addition of these elements.

Social-Economic Impacts

Impacts on Institutions and Businesses:

Changes proposed for the project area should not have an adverse impact on pedestrian access to the institutions, agencies and businesses located within the project area; however, the United States Secret Service (USSS) may block pedestrian access to the restricted area when the highest level of security is in effect. The existing bollard location on Jackson Place is south of the White House Historical Association (WHHA) entry; therefore, they are not impacted during high security periods. The new bollard location is proposed north of the WHHA; therefore, during periods of high security, mitigation will be needed to ensure unobstructed pedestrian access to the WHHA entrance. Bollard placement in front of Riggs Bank and the Treasury Building's main entrance at Pennsylvania Avenue and 15th Streets will be resolved in the final design to minimize potential conflict with pedestrian access and visual impact on historic resources.

The removal of staff parking places along Jackson Place will be mitigated by the close proximity of public parking to the project area.

Customer access to Riggs Bank would be fully served by all entries at Pennsylvania Avenue in the planned Alternative, while the delivery access would need to be only minimally altered to schedule the deliveries through the use of the Madison Place security gate. The bollard line, as originally proposed, has been moved to reduce direct impact on the bank. The proposed action would not compromise views of the buildings façade.

The current placement and spacing of trees in front of the Renwick Gallery and Riggs Bank is important to the symmetry of the design and establishment of the grandness, formality and dignity desired for this important civic space. The proposed trees will be placed to minimize the impacts to the views of the Riggs Bank's main entries. In

addition, since the building height will exceed the heights of the planned tree row, the prominence of the buildings and their façades will remain completely unaffected.

Impacts on Visitor Use and Experience:

Visitor use and experience will be enhanced as a result of the proposed action as indicated in the EA; therefore, no significant adverse impact has been determined.

Impacts on the News Media

News media access to Madison Place to cover the Inaugural Parade will continue. Since the news media requires access to this area only once every four years, no problems are anticipated that would prevent access to the news media.

Impacts On Recreational Users and Pedestrians

Recreational users and pedestrians will have continued access to the project area. Enhanced landscaping, curb and sidewalk improvements and changes to the travelway will serve to improve the pedestrian and recreational user experience.

Air Quality Impacts

Air quality, associated with pollutants due to vehicle emissions, will not increase as a result of the proposed action; therefore, no substantial impact to air quality is anticipated.

Noise Impacts

Noise will not increase in the project area as a result of the proposed action, except for noise associated with construction activities. However, noise levels will not exceed the 80 dB(A) level threshold of the DC Noise Control Act.

Farmland Impacts

Not Applicable

Relocation Impacts

Not Applicable

Joint Development Impacts

Not Applicable

Water Quality Impacts

There will be no long-term water quality impacts as a result of the proposed action with street and sidewalk management practices in place during construction.

Permits

Securing of the applicable permits will not have a significant impact on this project.

Wetlands Impacts

No Wetlands exist in the project area

Floodplains Impacts

No floodplains exist in the project area

Wild and Scenic Rivers

No wild and scenic rivers exist in the project area

Coastal Barriers

No coastal barriers exist in the project area

Costal Zone Impacts

No coastal zones exist in the project area

Threatened or Endangered Species

No threatened or endangered species are known to frequent the project area.

Historic Preservation

Issues associated with final mitigation of impacts on historic properties will be resolved in the final design stage and through continuing consultation with consulting parties. Many of the major historic preservation issues raised early on in the National Historic Preservation Act - Section 106 consultation process have been addressed in the current preliminary design plans. Consultation, review and approval of final plans by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), Commission of Fine Arts and District Historic Preservation Office are scheduled to occur after approval of the NEPA action and preliminary plan approval by the NCPC. It is anticipated that a Memorandum of Agreement between various interested parties (including FHWA, DC SHPO and ACHP) will be executed after NEPA document and NCPC preliminary plan approval.

Archeological Preservation

No archeological resources of significance have been identified within Lafayette Park to date.

Environmental Justice

There are no low-income or minority communities within the project area; therefore, there are no impacts to low-income or minority communities.

Hazardous Waste Sites

No hazardous waste sites exist within the project area

Visual and Aesthetic Qualities

Removal of the temporary security measures in tandem with the improved new landscaping, streetscape amenities, paving materials, redesigned guard booths and new aesthetically pleasing security features will function as an enhancement to the visual and aesthetic qualities of the proposed action.

Construction Impacts

Construction impacts associated with the build alternative are short-term impacts that will be in effect only during the construction period, which is estimated to be eleven months in duration. Impacts will be mitigated by measures in the construction contract requirements (noise, sediment control, access, etc.).

Transportation Impacts

Essentially, transportation impacts associated with the proposed action would not change substantially from the pre-existing condition. At Jackson Place, the existing bollard line would be relocated slightly north of its' present location and a sally port would be created which would prevent tailgating, thus allowing the security guard to control vehicle entry. On Madison Place, the same conditions would exist, with the exception of the location of the relocation of the bollard line. The pre-existing bollard line would remain on Madison Place.

On Pennsylvania Avenue at 15th and 17th Streets, the existing barrier line of planters and hydraulic plate barriers will be removed and a dual barrier line consisting of a combination of fixed, removable, and hydraulic retractable bollards will be installed. The existing barrier lines will be relocated outward toward the intersections, and a second, inner barrier line installed to form the "sally port." The new outer bollard line will be located 28 feet from the face of the intersection to allow one car to queue before entering the sally port. These entrance portals, in combination with those on Jackson and Madison Places, would accommodate multiple routes in and out of the precinct for presidential or head-of-state motorcades, emergency vehicles and the Downtown Circulator.

Pedestrian traffic would remain essentially unaffected by the proposed action; therefore, these changes would not have a significant impact on pedestrian or vehicular traffic entering the secured area.

Circulator Route:

Multiple routes for the proposed Downtown Circulator are accommodated without detracting from the generally pedestrian use of Pennsylvania Avenue. The Circulator

would traverse between 15th and 17th Street either via a direct route along Pennsylvania Avenue, or a less direct route south on Jackson Place, east along Pennsylvania Avenue, and north on Madison Place. The Circulator, a supplement to the downtown transit, is an important component to re-establish limited cross town access since Pennsylvania Avenue is considered a contributing element of the historic street plan of Washington and a very important link in the established grid of the District of Columbia's transportation network. The proposed Circulator will have a delineated thoroughfare within the precinct and function as an enhancement to transportation.

Utilities

While there will be some changes to underground utilities as a result of the proposed action, they would not be substantial in nature. Electric, gas, telephone, and water lines under Pennsylvania Avenue would be bored beneath or relocated as necessary during construction associated with this project. There are no major impacts anticipated related to utility relocations beyond those normally incurred doing routine construction projects. Arrangements will be made to coordinate all construction activities with any impacted utility operator/owner to assure continued uninterrupted service to customers in the project area.

Biotic Community

Vegetation within Lafayette Park would remain unchanged, and the wildlife that exists within the Park would remain unaffected by the proposed action, with the exception of the short-term effects of construction noise and activities. However, this should not pose any significant adverse effect on resident wildlife.

The proposed action requires that new trees would replace the existing trees along the north and south side of Pennsylvania Avenue. While removal of the existing trees is regrettable, the proposal calls for new trees that are appropriate both historically, and symbolically and which will grow to the proper dimensions, not obstructing views of the Inaugural Parade, businesses or institutions adjacent to Pennsylvania Avenue. The long-term impact of this action are not considered significant.

Consistency With Local Plans

There are two elements of the National Capital Planning Commission's Comprehensive Plan that most directly apply to the Pennsylvania Avenue Security and Landscape Design Project; these are the *Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element* and the *Preservation and Historic Features Element*. The overall concept design proposal for *Pennsylvania Avenue At The White House* complies with the *Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element*. The concept design has met the project's objectives to satisfy both security and circulation requirements and to beautify and improve the quality of the public space. This has been achieved while respecting the historic integrity and the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans. The landscape components enhance the public buildings and civic space, and provide a flexible space for public use and gatherings. Impacts associated with security requirements have been minimized to the degree possible so that they do not detract from the historic character of the site.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

Construction of Pennsylvania Avenue to implement the creation of a pedestrian space will result in the irretrievable loss of trees along the north and south curb in front of Lafayette Park. New mature tree species will be planted along both the south and north curbs of Pennsylvania Avenue to replace most of the existing trees lost during construction; however, it is expected that it may take several years for these trees to match the stature of existing trees.

Land used for the proposed action would be irreversibly committed; however, the enhancements to Pennsylvania Avenue are reversible, if it is deemed that the security threat changes or technologies improve to allow high volumes of traffic, Pennsylvania Avenue could be reversed back to a 84-foot wide thoroughfare with relative ease.

Fossil fuels (oil, gasoline), labor, construction materials, and natural resources used in the fabrication of construction materials for the proposed action would not be retrievable; however, these materials are not scarce, and their use would not affect their current availability or supply. Any construction will also require a substantial one-time expenditure of Federal funds that are not retrievable. The commitment of these resources is based on the concept that those constituents that use facilities within the study area will benefit by the improved landscape quality and enhanced security measures that are anticipated to outweigh the commitment of these resources.

Cumulative Impacts

The Build Alternative would allow for the coordination of plans for the proposed action to the modification of Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets, N.W., with the overall goals of *The National Capitol Urban Design and Security Plan*. The total cumulative impacts associated with the proposed action are anticipated to be relatively minor considering the extent of enhancements to an existing facility. However, impacts associated with historical and cultural resources may be considered sufficient to justify mitigation where possible; therefore, they require further review by the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer or the Advisory Council On Historic Preservation.

The alternative would not prohibit any future plans for the reversibility of Pennsylvania Avenue back to an 84-foot wide traffic thoroughfare. Impacts, during the period of construction, associated with the removal of trees or other vegetation and water quality would not have a significant impact on the environment of reversability. The project area would remain essentially as presently existing, only in an enhanced state. The proposed action will not preclude or adversely affect planned improvements for the White House complex recommended in *The White House & President's Park – Comprehensive Design Plan* completed by the National Park Service in 1999. The actions proposed for the modification to Pennsylvania Avenue, between 15th and 17th Streets, NW, coincide and are compatible with the long-term plans proposed in the 1999 White House plan.

Public Involvement

Decision-making, coordination and public involvement in the planning and preliminary design of the proposed action was initiated early in the process.

The Environmental Assessment was distributed to the public and local, State, and Federal agencies on April 23, 2003 for a 30-day comment period. The document was available for review at the National Capital Planning Commission and the Martin Luther King Library in Washington, DC, the Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division Office in Sterling, VA., and on the World Wide Web.

The availability of the document was noticed in the following general newspapers: The Washington Post and the Washington Times.

The summary issues raised in comment letters are attached as an appendix to the FONSI.

Summary

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has determined that the Build Alternative for *Pennsylvania Avenue At The White House* will have no significant impact on the human environment. This finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is based on the attached environmental assessment (EA), which has been evaluated by FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. The FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached EA.

Approved: /s/ Melisa L. Ridenour
Melisa Ridenour, Division Engineer
Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division
Federal Highway Administration

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